

A Matter of Survival: Volunteering

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A Matter of Survival: Volunteering

Volunteering By, In, and With Low-Income Communities



A Matter of Survival: Volunteering

Points of Light Foundation

The Points of Light Foundation is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization devoted to promoting volunteerism. Our mission, to engage more people more effectively to solve serious social problems, is fulfilled through partnerships with a nationwide network of Volunteer Centers and through alliances with corporations, nonprofits, government agencies, individuals, and the media. Through these partnerships, the Foundation connects volunteer leaders with the necessary resources to engage people more effectively in community service; makes people aware of volunteer service throughout the nation; connects people with essential resources and builds skills for efficient volunteer engagement; seeks to build an infrastructure that encourages people to engage at the local level; and motivates and mobilizes volunteers from all walks of life to engage in volunteer service. The Points of Light Foundation believes that volunteering is a tool that brings people together; it is the most powerful resource to combat the disconnection and alienation that is so prevalent in our nation today.

Points of Light Foundation

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Points of Light Foundation

**Published by
The Points of Light Foundation**

ISBN# 1-58534-040-5

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at 1-800-272-8306 or 703-803-8171.

**Special thanks to the Annie E. Casey
Foundation, especially to Ralph Smith
and Carole Thompson for their
leadership and support in this work.
Deep appreciation to Nettie Coad for
her insight and for allowing us to
adopt "A Matter of Survival"; and
thanks to the Points of Light
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... the power and potential of volunteering...



...the power and potential of volunteering...

A Letter From the President

The Points of Light Foundation is pleased to present *A Matter of Survival: Volunteering By, In, and With Low-Income Communities*. This monograph documents the rich traditions of self-help and civic engagement that are found in America's "tough" communities—communities most often found in the inner city, where resources are scarce and where it is difficult to live and to raise a family. There is also inner-city wisdom here for the Volunteer Centers, community foundations, nonprofits, the business community, and others searching for better ways to partner with the resident drivers of low-income neighborhood renewal.

A Matter of Survival is the product of a 1996 invitation from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to the Points of Light Foundation to explore the role of volunteering in building the social capital necessary to transform distressed neighborhoods into family-supporting communities. We set out to document volunteering activities in these communities, but along the way, we came to a much deeper understanding of the myriad homegrown, informal networks and service vehicles that animate residents and empower them to drive reform.

The Points of Light Foundation utilized this opportunity to listen, learn, and share our learnings. We convened national, regional, and grassroots leaders who shared their experience and wisdom in focus groups and workshops, and we recorded their wisdom. From them, we learned what worked and why, and under what circumstances. We used our own grants as vehicles to create partnerships that supported and strengthened local initiatives, and because we listened carefully, many of these initiatives bore fruit. This report shares that experience and that knowledge.

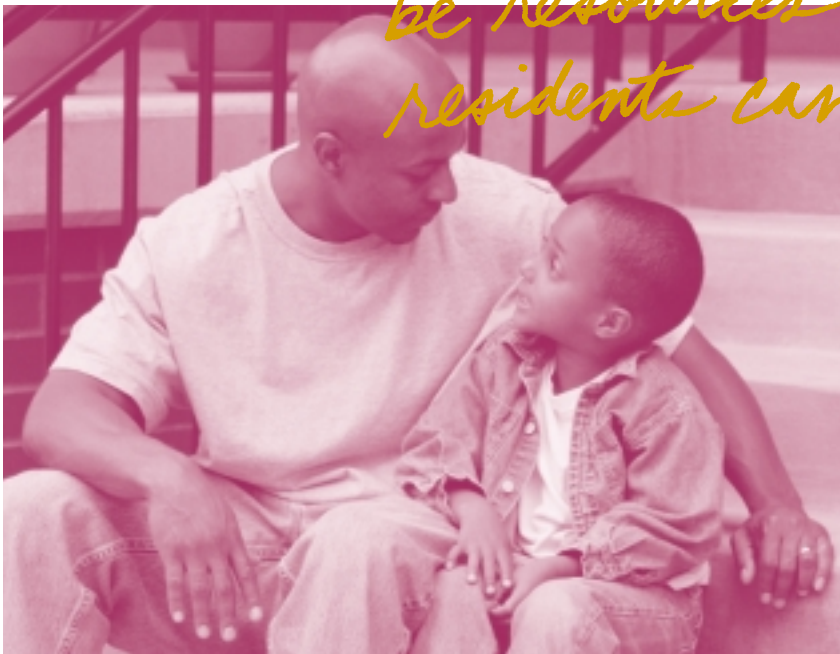
We are indebted to the Annie E. Casey Foundation for challenging us to go beyond the accepted confines of mainstream volunteering. We have now tempered our ideas and vernacular to make space for "helping out," "giving back," "neighboring," and "street walking"—the term used by one resident who walked her neighborhood every night to check on the welfare of senior citizens. We have developed a profound appreciation for the power and potential of volunteering in these tough communities. We hold a renewed respect for the resilience of residents who champion civic engagement and community building with a conviction and resourcefulness that cannot be denied. These so-called "low-income," "marginalized," and "blighted" communities are—in our lexicon—in fact, communities of opportunity.

Our particular thanks also go out to those community leaders and groups who helped us in this initiative and to thousands of others who work tirelessly every day to make their neighborhoods a better place for children and families. *A Matter of Survival* is dedicated to you. This is a first step in what we hope will be a rich sharing of ideas, knowledge, and experiences that will ultimately benefit all of us who are dedicated to partnering with America's communities of opportunity.

Robert K. Goodwin

President and
Chief Executive Officer
The Points of Light Foundation

Family volunteering helps revitalize the social bonds through which children learn to care, adults exercise social responsibility, young people can be leaders, family members can be resources for social change, and community residents can build connections with each other.



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A Sense of Community

"As a society, we have lost a sense of community. Everything is about *my space, my car, my yard, and my land*. We have got to get back to looking to each other for solutions." Lucy, a community leader in a low-income neighborhood in Greensboro, North Carolina, offered this recommendation for communities like hers across the country.¹ As an experienced organizer, volunteer, and neighborhood figurehead, she was skeptical of the efforts of middle-class volunteer organizations that were always "coming into" the neighborhood to "give back" while her fellow residents were on the receiving end. In her mind, when children grow up seeing their families continually receiving and not giving at all, "it's not a good lesson to learn." It is also not healthy for the communities in which the children will grow up.

When you talk with Lucy about her community, you notice her strong belief that her neighbors have something to give—it is just that no one asks them to give anything. With faith in the untapped assets of her fellow residents, Lucy founded a neighborhood organization that convenes residents to address issues of concern to them and helps them create local solutions. For instance, families do not always have enough food and are often unable to access emergency food assistance programs elsewhere in the city. Through this program, neighbors came together and decided to open their own food bank. One resident, a woman who has been battling a chronic illness, opened a room in her home to house the food bank. Lucy explains how the project brought joy to this woman, rather than adding a burden, because her ability to contribute increased her feelings of self-worth. To stock the food bank, residents are asked to donate a can of food each month. Local youth collect the food and deliver it to the food bank. Lucy feels that no matter how impoverished a family is, everyone should be able to give some level of support.

Lucy acknowledges that there are challenges in this kind of volunteer initiative. People are extremely busy with multiple jobs and the demands of caring for children and trying to make ends meet. Some residents simply do not feel obligated to help others. Furthermore, there are pressing community issues that sometimes prevent plans from moving forward.

Finally, sometimes the resources are just not available. For instance, when the community came together to equip a neighborhood "safe house" for women in crisis, project organizers circulated a wish list and collected contributions of blankets, toys, and bedding from residents. The project could not, however, afford certain equipment—such as a refrigerator—and reached out to businesses and organizations, including the Points of Light Foundation, to meet these needs. In Lucy's mind, neighbors' contributions of items and time "cost nothing...and can go on for a long time." When supplemented through outside partnerships—based on need and built on trust—neighborhoods are empowered to develop sustainable solutions to their problems. According to Lucy, neighborhoods will be strengthened if "people feel empowered and take ownership of community problems, develop their ideas for resolving the problems, and get involved in making sure that the issues are addressed." Her commitment as a volunteer and the positive results that her leadership has had on her community are examples of the effectiveness of volunteer action as a tool for building communities.

Mobilizing Low-Income Communities for Change After a decade of economic expansion, many in America have the impression that our country is awash in affluence, sailing high on a "rising tide." While it has been a fruitful time for people at the high end of the economic spectrum, working-class families have not benefited proportionally. In 1997, the Census Bureau reported that the average college graduate earned \$40,478 annually, compared to the \$22,895 in annual income of the typical high school graduate—or 76 percent more. In 1975, college graduates earned, on average, 57 percent more annually than those who only completed high school.² As the income gap has widened, poor families have become increasingly isolated, pushed further toward the margins of society. This is reflected not just statistically, but geographically—by the circumscribed neighborhoods in which poor families live. While there are efforts on the part of foundations, think tanks, and nonprofit groups to work in partnership with low-

As the income gap has widened, poor families have become increasingly isolated, pushed further toward the margins of society.



income communities to help improve conditions, traditional volunteer organizations have not realized their full potential to help achieve social and economic change in low-income communities. Across the country, volunteerism as a movement is flourishing, but the increased efforts of volunteers have not led to large-scale improvements in the lives of the families and neighborhoods most in need of help. Likewise, community-building efforts in low-income neighborhoods have expanded, but the barriers of isolation and concerns for day-to-day survival continue to impede progress.

The project described in this report emerged from the leadership of the Points of Light Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, in the belief that there is a critical need for traditional volunteer organizations—as well as corporations, foundations, and nonprofit organizations—to partner with low-income communities and help mobilize local resources to address community problems and strengthen families. We believe that these mainstream organizations can find ways to bridge the disparate sectors of our society and leverage resources to benefit communities still in need.

Volunteering Builds Social Capital Transforming distressed neighborhoods into family-supporting communities will require the full mobilization of all of a community's assets. Among the most undervalued of these assets are the naturally occurring networks through which

Working with low-income communities often requires partnering with residents, neighborhood leaders, and informal groups, rather than institutions.

neighbors and residents volunteer to address and resolve common problems. Strategic attention to, and more intentional nurturing and use of, these networks could be a major contribution to sustainable, resident-driven community transformation.³

We have learned through this project, through stories of people like Lucy, that there is a great deal of volunteering happening in low-income communities that previously has not been recognized. The purpose of this report is to identify and describe this kind of community involvement and provide insights that will enable mainstream volunteer organizations to forge meaningful partnerships with low-income communities; to leverage the assets of each partner; and, ultimately, to improve society as a whole.

A key challenge for the partnerships described here is that the community-based groups with which mainstream volunteer organizations are encouraged to partner are not usually traditional nonprofit institutions, but groups of individuals. Working with low-income communities often requires partnering with residents, neighborhood leaders, and informal groups, rather than institutions. For most mainstream organizations, this is a new way of doing things.

Strengthening Families—the Ultimate Goal The impetus for this initiative came from the innovative thinking of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which, over the past decade, has explored a range of ways to improve the lives of children living in poverty. The Annie E. Casey Foundation has concluded that it cannot help poor children by focusing on children alone; the families and neighborhoods that support children must be strengthened as a whole.

Strong Neighborhoods = Strong Families “Distressed neighborhoods can be assisted to transform themselves into places with the conditions, climate, and opportunities which support and strengthen families. Therefore, we are committed to encouraging, supporting, and promoting work that helps disinvested communities to strengthen their social fabric and foster more family-supportive environments.”⁴

The partnership between the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Points of Light Foundation evolved from an exploration of the link between efforts to strengthen low-income families and communities (the current focus of the Annie E. Casey Foundation) and volunteer mobilization (the mission of the Points of Light Foundation). In our experience, volunteering can play an integral role in strengthening communities and, in turn, families. It can even directly strengthen families, as seen in the Points of Light’s Family Matters initiative, a program developed through a partnership with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The Family Matters Initiative The impetus for Family Matters was an interest in helping families find new strengths through volunteer service and in developing methods to enhance and broaden the opportunities for families to serve their communities and one another. Family volunteering helps revitalize the social bonds through which children learn to care, adults exercise social responsibility, young people can be leaders, family members can be resources for social change, and community residents can build connections with each other.

Such outcomes have been achieved in places like Houston, where Volunteer Houston has helped start a Family Matters Club in the Greater Third Ward area, a cluster of impoverished African-American and Latino neighborhoods. Over time, family volunteering has thrived, other community efforts have been spawned, and businesses and outside volunteer groups have taken notice and joined forces to strengthen the community.

The project described in this report focuses on mobilizing volunteers around initiatives that strengthen families directly, as well as those that strengthen neighborhoods directly and families indirectly as a result of increased social capital. We are grateful to the Annie E. Casey Foundation for the opportunity to explore these issues and to contribute to this important work.

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The Language for Partnering

“Volunteering”—a Construct Traditionally, people who live in low-income communities have been viewed primarily as recipients, rather than providers, of service. Yet it has become increasingly clear that many people who live in these communities volunteer and play a critical role in restoring the health and well-being of the neighborhoods in which they live. Volunteering has been, and continues to be, a source of survival.

Much of the volunteering by people in low-income communities takes place through an informal process: People help each other when they can, and neighbors come together in times of need. It has happened for centuries, in varied ways, in communities of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Community members might purchase food for a neighbor in need, organize block patrols for safe streets, and offer safe places in their homes for neighbors in crisis. In one Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, community that we observed, a woman described her activity to help the community as “walking her neighborhood each night, checking on the seniors who lived alone to make sure that their doors were locked and [that] they were safe.”

That woman called her work “street walking.” Others in low-income communities call it “helping out,” “giving back,” or “neighboring,” a term coined by the Volunteer Center of Greensboro, North Carolina. To many residents of low-income communities, the terms “volunteering” and “community service” have negative connotations—for example, court-ordered community service. To others, the terms simply do not resonate culturally. Most immigrant and minority communities have a wealth of traditions and values tied to helping others, but the term “volunteer” does not translate into the terms they use to talk about these activities.

We have concluded, during the course of this initiative, that the term “volunteer” is a culturally-specific term and, by definition, excludes many populations. Adopting the terms “neighboring” and “community involvement” expands the meaning of volunteering to all sectors of society. We acknowledge, however, that employing new language is a process that takes time.

We will use the terms “traditional volunteering” or “mainstream volunteering” to contrast formal, organized volunteering mainly by members of middle- and upper-class communities to the mostly informal helping and neighboring that is characteristic of low-income communities.

Our work in low-income communities focused primarily on educating and shifting the attitudes of traditional volunteer organizations, in addition to raising awareness among the other sectors that have also shown a commitment to build capacity in low-income communities. We hope that funders, national nonprofits, and corporations find the information and models relevant to their work in low-income communities and will be inspired to build the kinds of partnerships profiled here.

“Low-Income”—Deficit-Based Versus Asset-Based Language

Language is extremely important in the process of building partnerships. Negative labels describing low-income communities sometimes impede our ability to partner effectively. Deficit-based terms, often applied to racial and ethnic minority communities, may objectify residents as problems and mask their potential for community improvement and self-sufficiency.

Nettie Coad from Greensboro, North Carolina, noted that it is “disrespectful and dehumanizing” to call neighborhoods full of families “fragile” or “blighted.” Another resident commented, “I have heard the community referred to as low-income and at-risk, and it denotes helplessness. We do not lay claim to this. We refer to ourselves as a community of opportunity, a community of strong assets and capable leadership.” These terms for communities lacking financial resources communicate the challenges as well as the energy, promise, and hope in these neighborhoods.

Similarly, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has adopted the term “tough” to characterize those communities where crime rates are high, living conditions are difficult, and resources are limited—but where resilience, assets, and opportunity are also evident. From this point on, “tough” will be used, in addition to “low-income,” to describe the communities in which the work documented in this monograph has taken place.

“I have heard the community referred to as low-income and at-risk, and it denotes helplessness. We do not lay claim to this. We refer to ourselves as a community of opportunity, a community of strong assets and capable leadership.”

Resident
Greensboro, North Carolina



*...volunteering in low-income neighborhoods...
a means of strengthening families and neighborhoods.*

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Goals and Strategies

The goals of the project were to explore several questions:

- What is the nature of volunteering as it happens within low-income communities, performed by local people?
- What are some of the challenges faced by traditional volunteer organizations that try to “go into” low-income communities for volunteer initiatives?
- What are the key strategies through which traditional volunteer organizations can partner with low-income communities and help mobilize residents to solve community problems and strengthen families?

In the first year of activities, a team of community experts was convened to develop an initial understanding of volunteering in low-income neighborhoods as a means of strengthening families and neighborhoods. Participants in the meeting included local community partners of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Points of Light Foundation, Volunteer Center leaders, youth volunteers, and select experts known for their work in this field. From this initial session, three key ideas emerged that participants believed were essential to helping mobilize residents in tough communities:

- Empower community members to identify the community problems on which they want to focus.
- Help community members to identify and uncover their unique gifts and talents and acknowledge neighboring that is already happening in low-income communities.
- Affirm that neighboring should be structured to provide an exchange for tangible rewards such as continued eligibility for housing assistance, meals, or educational assistance.

The next phase of the project included a range of activities to explore these issues further and begin to stimulate innovation. First, we organized four community dialogues around the country and invited community and grassroots professionals to discuss volunteering and

provide feedback on the initial three key ideas described. These sessions were held in Denver, Milwaukee, New Orleans, and Washington, DC. Next, we hosted a day-long meeting of community leaders and organizers working to build social capital through grassroots volunteer initiatives. We then identified and studied examples of programs that were successfully mobilizing volunteers in tough communities. Finally, we engaged Points of Light Foundation constituencies, such as Volunteer Centers, national and local nonprofits, businesses, and youth, in an additional series of dialogues on this topic.

To stimulate innovation, we selected eight communities, through a competitive process, to receive grants to create new programs, or enhance existing programs, promoting volunteer mobilization in low-income communities. Community foundations received grants to partner with a Volunteer Center and one or more community or neighborhood organizations. These grantees, referred to as pilot sites or pilot communities, are discussed in greater detail in “Innovation Through Grants” (page 15).

Volunteer Centers The network of nearly 500 Volunteer Centers across the United States mobilize people and resources to deliver creative solutions to community problems. Volunteer Centers:

- Connect people with opportunities to serve;
- Build the capacity for effective local volunteering;
- Promote volunteering; and
- Participate in strategic initiatives that mobilize volunteers to meet local needs.

The three key elements identified in our initial discussions were validated by participants in subsequent dialogues, by research, and by the experiences of the eight pilot sites. Participants also added one new essential factor: the need to build trusting relationships in order for community involvement initiatives to succeed. These key findings, and additional related learnings, are discussed in depth in “Vital Success Factors” (page 22).

Our hope...find new ways to work with residents as equals on community problems, rather than providing charity from "outside."

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Innovation Through Grants

Rationale for Grantmaking Initiative Community foundations, numbering over 500 with assets exceeding \$17 billion, have emerged as an important force in the world of philanthropy. Located in cities and towns across the country and designed with a specific focus on their localities, they have become primary funders of nonprofit organizations as well as leaders in important community matters. Based on the Points of Light Foundation's past success with similar initiatives, we chose to work with community foundations in order to stimulate innovation around—and bring in new partners to promote—volunteering in low-income communities.

The Points of Light Foundation's first experience with community foundations, through the Partnership for National Service's Service as a Strategy Initiative (SASI), was a creative response to the Ford Foundation's desire to make a national impact on AmeriCorps programs. Having worked extensively with community foundations, Ford believed that it could be most effective on a community level by selecting the Partnership to identify and distribute funds to community foundations that would, in turn, match the funds and distribute them to local programs.

A few years later, after the President's Summit for America's Future brought together community leaders and volunteers from across the country in a show of support for children and youth, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation approached the Points of Light Foundation with a similar question: "How can a national foundation be most effective in contributing to local efforts?" The Connecting Through Service Initiative was thus launched, and the Points of Light Foundation worked with community foundation and Volunteer Center collaboratives that matched Kellogg funds with local funds to support organizations involved in local Summit follow-up efforts.

We find that community foundations can be important partners for low-income communities—not only because of their potential to provide resources, but also for the credibility that they bring to the partnership. However, critics point out that many community foundations have yet to fully maximize their impact on all parts of their communi-

ties—especially on disenfranchised groups that traditionally have been ignored and misunderstood by philanthropic organizations. Therefore, we decided to work with community foundations for two key reasons: First, we see them as potentially strong local partners; second, they are able to leverage additional resources to make meaningful improvements for families in these communities.

How Community Foundations Can Partner With Low-Income Communities

- Survey residents or host a neighborhood issues forum to help members identify important issues.
- Help neighborhood organizations prioritize and plan initiatives.
- Provide neighborhood grants that don't require the recipients to be formally/legally organized.
- Develop local leadership by providing training and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.
- Recognize and document successful initiatives.

The rationale was similar for choosing Volunteer Centers as primary partners: First, they value collaboration; second, they are most effective when their collaborative efforts bring together individuals, neighborhoods, schools, businesses, government, nonprofits, and faith-based and other community organizations to achieve a common vision. Like community foundations, Volunteer Centers have made efforts to position themselves as resources for low-income communities. Still, they have yet to realize their full potential in this role. Our hope in piloting these collaborative initiatives with Volunteer Centers is that they will increase their role in community-building initiatives in tough communities and find new ways to work with residents as equals on community problems, rather than providing charity from "outside."

Community foundations can be important partners for low-income communities—not only because of their potential to provide resources, but also for the credibility that they bring to the partnership.

How Volunteer Centers Can Partner With Low-Income Communities

- Offer neighborhood groups training and technical assistance for recruiting, managing, and retaining volunteers.
- Provide assistance in developing grant proposals or identifying resources.
- Learn about and share examples of successful initiatives in other tough communities.
- Train other nonprofit organizations and Volunteer Centers in how to partner effectively with low-income communities.
- Appoint a local resident to serve on the Board of Directors of their local Volunteer Center and/or nonprofit organizations.

Criteria for Selection of Pilot Communities Eight community foundations were selected to serve as "Stimulating Innovation" pilot sites. Grants were awarded to create new programs, or to enhance or expand existing local neighborhood initiatives in low-income communities.

The grants were designed to accomplish three objectives:

- Raise awareness among traditional volunteer organizations and funders of how volunteering happens in tough communities;
- Encourage these organizations to build meaningful partnerships with tough communities and to build relationships with each other; and
- Leverage financial and technical resources to support volunteer efforts in tough communities.

These grants were also used to test hypotheses from previous research. Each site employed strategies identified in the initial dialogues; the sites' experiences ultimately affirmed those strategies and indicated seven critical factors for success in Volunteer Mobilization Partnerships. These factors are described in detail in "Vital Success Factors" (page 22).

The eight grantees were selected based on their proposed models and projects and their potential to accomplish the goals noted. Each pilot site partnership comprised a community foundation, the local Volunteer Center, and one or more neighborhood groups. The community foundation served as the primary grantee and fiscal agent for the project. (References on the following pages to pilot sites or communities refer to all members of the grant collaborative.)

Overview of Pilot Site Models

Denver, Colorado—Engaging Corps Members as Volunteers in Their Communities

The Piton Foundation's Colorado Youth Corps Association used this grant to stimulate volunteerism by youth corps members and, in turn, other residents in their own communities. Youth corps are year-long youth development programs through which youth serve the community while completing their education and learning marketable skills. The Youth Corps Association joined with Year One Youth Corps, one of four urban youth corps in Colorado, and Denver's Volunteer Center, Metro Volunteers!, to implement community service projects in the low-income neighborhoods from which youth corps members were recruited. While the youth corps members initially joined the program to gain employment experience and earn General Equivalency Diplomas, this initiative allowed them to develop their leadership skills, cultivate a commitment to volunteerism, and use these skills to impact their own neighborhoods. With training from Metro Volunteers! and funding from this grant and the Piton and Denver Foundations, corps members identified local needs, planned projects, and ultimately implemented a Make a Difference Day program, several community murals and gardens, and an intergenerational oral history project.

The Denver, Colorado, model is important for other communities because it:

- Empowers members to serve their own communities.
- Focuses on developing young leaders as role models and forces change in low-income communities.

Tampa Bay, Florida—Empowering Fathers and Teens in Low-Income Communities

The Community Foundation of Tampa Bay chose three initiatives focused on empowering fathers and teens. The Nurturing Fathers program engaged fathers in self-esteem and relationship building skill development. In addition to honing their parenting skills, the men decided that they would teach parenting skills to other neighborhood residents and start a church-based volunteer tutoring program. The Neighborhood Youth Volunteer Initiative and Youth as Resources program involved two different groups of teens in identifying community needs and implementing neighborhood-improvement projects. Outcomes have included an organization called STEP, Students and Teachers Emphasizing Peace, and a community outreach project called "A Multi-Cultural Celebration in Honor of Black History Month."

The Tampa Bay, Florida, model is important for other communities because it:

- Focuses on empowering fathers as a way to strengthen families and increase community involvement.
- Cultivates youth leadership in order to mobilize residents of low-income neighborhoods, as in Denver.

“The Community HeroCard Program is fundamentally about bridging the economic divide that plagues many of Minneapolis’ neighborhoods.”

Partner Organization Staff
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Baltimore, Maryland—Engaging Residents of Low-Income Communities as Planning Partners

The Central Maryland Consortium on Volunteerism, in partnership with the Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers, used this grant as an opportunity to engage representatives from low-income communities in a planning process to establish a new Volunteer Center. The new Center, as a result of this input, offers a variety of programs to engage residents from these neighborhoods as volunteers and focuses specifically on expanding after-school programs through parent involvement. In addition to creating a new Center and three new youth service programs, the project offered a roundtable on “Getting Neighborhoods Involved in Change” through the new Center’s Volunteer School and developed and distributed a “tips sheet” showing ways that parents can support their children’s after-school programs.

The Baltimore, Maryland, model is important for other communities because it:

- Engages residents at the outset of a planning process all the way through implementation, creating a sense of community ownership of the Center.
- Explicitly strengthens families in low-income communities by focusing on expanding youth programs and increasing parental involvement in them.

Minneapolis, Minnesota—Promoting Volunteerism as an Exchange

A grant to the Minneapolis Foundation helped expand the Minneapolis Community HeroCard Program, which offers volunteers the opportunity to be rewarded for their efforts. Volunteers in participating neighborhood organizations and nonprofits receive a HeroCard that tracks their volunteer time and converts it to Community Service Dollars, redeemable in participating stores around the city. This grant offered the project an opportunity to expand into a highly diverse neighborhood, recruit local merchants, and work with nonprofits and neighborhood organizations to utilize volunteers. The goal is not only to increase volunteerism specifically among low-income residents, for whom there are more barriers to volunteering, but also to improve relations between community residents and businesses in the area.

Still in progress, this project is an innovative implementation of the concept that volunteering should be an acceptable exchange that enables people with fewer resources to engage in neighboring activities. Not only will the HeroCard encourage more volunteers to participate, but it will also enable businesses to promote the importance of community involvement and act as allies to the low-income communities in which they do business.

The Minneapolis, Minnesota, model is important for other communities because it:

- Acknowledges and affirms that volunteering is an acceptable exchange and thereby helps minimize low-income residents’ barriers to volunteering.
- Provides a mechanism for building bridges between businesses and residents and/or neighborhood groups.

Greensboro, North Carolina—Building the Capacity of Informal Volunteers

The Volunteer Center, the Community Foundation of Greensboro, and active residents from two low-income neighborhoods—including Lucy, whose story opens this report—came together to formalize a type of informal volunteering that had been happening for a long time. In low-income neighborhoods such as Ole Ashboro and Eastside Park, residents suffering from domestic abuse had often sought shelter with a neighbor when they lacked the financial resources or transportation to escape a crisis. Community organizers identified these informal “safe houses” as a community asset that could be systematized and expanded.

With technical assistance and financial resources from partners, the community recruited neighbors to open their homes, solicited donations from a building supply company to outfit homes with child safety equipment, procured additional beds for the safe houses, and organized the community to provide a food bank for neighbors in need. As a result of this positive experience, the Volunteer Center expanded its community representation by naming a neighborhood leader to the Board of Directors.

The Greensboro, North Carolina, model is important for other communities because it:

- Builds on informal family-strengthening neighboring efforts in the community, validating existing community assets.
- Demonstrates how outside organizations such as Volunteer Centers and businesses can partner with existing community involvement efforts in low-income communities and add important resources that strengthen these initiatives.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—Leveraging Community Assets Through Training

The Philadelphia Foundation and the Volunteer Center identified faith-based organizations as an important resource in low-income communities that could be further enhanced through training and support. The Volunteer Center convened representatives of church groups and community development organizations for an intensive training program in volunteer management. The training not only helped build individual and group leadership capacity, but also provided a vehicle for the development of new partnerships within the low-income communities—and between those groups and mainstream volunteer organizations. One outcome of the training was the publication of a brochure for local nonprofits and trainers that highlighted the differences in vocabulary between neighborhood groups, mainstream nonprofit organizations, and communities of faith. The final step for the project is a “Train the Trainer” component that will allow the trained leaders to impact their own neighborhoods to an even greater degree.

The Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, model is important for other communities because it:

- Builds on existing community assets to enhance community involvement, in this case, the ongoing civic involvement of communities of faith.
- Focuses on cultivating local leadership as a means of strengthening communities and families.
- Empowers the community and allows community leaders to mobilize residents with community-based initiatives.

Providence, Rhode Island—Empowering Families in Public Housing

The Volunteer Center of Rhode Island and the Providence Housing Authority joined forces, through this grant, to engage low-income families in volunteerism in a way that empowers both children and parents to change their communities and their lives. The collaborative used this grant to implement after-school and summer programs for youth with an emphasis on community service, with parents serving alongside children. They also developed a Youth Service Council that provides leadership to other youth by identifying service projects and engaging their peers in community action.

As in Baltimore, involving parents in the youth programs is of primary importance. Adults volunteer to the extent that they can by working with the youth, as well as providing clerical support. By volunteering, adults earn credits that allow their children to attend the youth program, providing an exchange for their efforts. Additionally, adults earn welfare-to-work credits, may participate in job training classes, and may accompany their children on weekend outings and community service projects.

The Providence, Rhode Island, model is important for other communities because it:

- Empowers youth and parents individually, through youth development and adult training programs, and strengthens the family as a unit by encouraging adult volunteering alongside their own children.
- Provides an array of meaningful incentives to adults in exchange for neighboring. In contrast to Minneapolis, volunteering in the Providence Housing Authority can be done in exchange for credits and services residents need, rather than retail items.

Memphis, Tennessee—Providing Training and Technical Assistance to Develop Neighborhood Leadership

The Community Foundation of Greater Memphis used this grant as an opportunity to provide added support to recipients of its Neighborhood Small Grants Program, an initiative of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation enabling community foundations to provide small grants to informal neighborhood organizations in low-income communities. A collaboration with the Volunteer Center allowed the community foundation to provide a range of training and technical assistance to neighborhood leaders—the Neighbor Network—in volunteer recruitment and management and in the development of action plans to expand block clubs. One key aspect of training was the opportunity to participate in brainstorming sessions to identify existing community assets.

The Memphis, Tennessee, model is important for other communities because it:

- Uses training and technical assistance, combined with financial resources, as a strategy for outside organizations to partner with neighborhood groups. This builds capacity while respecting local leadership and infrastructure.
- Acknowledges that grants to low-income communities may be ineffective without strong local leaders to implement them.

Using Neighborhood Grants to Promote Community Development

The Community Foundation of Greater Memphis implemented the Small Grants Program, created by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, to support new and existing activities in low-income neighborhoods. Through this initiative, the Foundation determined the following:

- Grants are a key neighborhood development strategy.
- Neighborhood development should be undertaken from an asset-building approach.
- Grants from outside sources need to be small to avoid forcing local organizations to readjust their priorities.

This was the first pool of revenue in Memphis available exclusively to neighborhood associations. The community foundation recognized that while neighborhood groups were rich in ideas and energy, they needed financial resources to carry out many of their goals. Since the program's inception, the community foundation has invested more than \$300,000 in grants to neighborhood groups and engaged over 80 volunteer-run neighborhood groups that never before had direct influence on expenditures to improve their neighborhoods.

The gifts and talents of community members are the most valuable assets for strengthening communities and building stronger families.



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Vital Success Factors

“[Residents’] involvement needs to be applicable to their day-to-day life. If it is about their children, they will come. About community improvement, maybe. If the purpose is far-reaching, no.”

Resident

Providence, Rhode Island

Our initial research and, ultimately, the experiences of the pilot sites have led us to conclude that in order to build effective, partnerships between traditional volunteer organizations and tough communities we must acknowledge and respond to several critical factors. These include, and expand on, the initial three key ideas discussed in “Goals and Strategies” (page 13). In order to create an effective joint initiative, potential partners must:

- Understand the nature of volunteering in low-income communities;
- Overcome barriers to community involvement in low-income communities;
- Empower communities to help themselves;
- Cultivate community members’ skills and talents;
- Strengthen existing community leadership;
- Acknowledge that neighboring is an exchange; and
- Ensure community readiness.

Understand the Nature of Volunteering in Low-Income Communities

One of the most important lessons of this project is that volunteering happens in tough communities, but that it is not called volunteering. Furthermore, while residents of these communities have a long history of helping, sharing, and giving back, they do not generally do it under the auspices, or with the assistance, of nonprofit volunteer organizations such as Volunteer Centers. Here, volunteering happens instead through neighborhood associations, community-based groups, and local churches and on an individual level. Often, volunteering in low-income communities receives little publicity and, as a result, receives little credit for the impact that it has on building communities and strengthening families.

Our pilot communities—all of which, with the exception of Greensboro, are federally designated as Enterprise Communities or Empowerment Zones—acknowledged this phenomenon by identifying neighborhood mobilization efforts currently underway in the community,

regardless of whether they were called “volunteer” initiatives. In Greensboro, North Carolina, the Volunteer Center tapped into this kind of effort already in place: the opening of “safe houses” to victims of domestic abuse. The success of the Greensboro partnership lies in the fact that it capitalizes on a community asset that previously might have been overlooked by traditional volunteer organizations because it was so informal.

Overcome Barriers to Community Involvement in Low-Income Communities

One goal of this initiative is to recognize that volunteering is occurring in tough communities. At the same time, we are also interested in learning how residents in these communities might be encouraged to take part in formal volunteer initiatives in their neighborhoods. It is important, then, to understand the range of barriers that prevent people in low-income communities from getting involved so that we can design initiatives that overcome these barriers:

- Lack of time and/or financial resources;
- Lack of child care;
- Lack of transportation;
- Low self-esteem or confidence in skills;
- Negative perceptions of volunteering or of external volunteer organizations; and
- Cultural and/or language barriers.

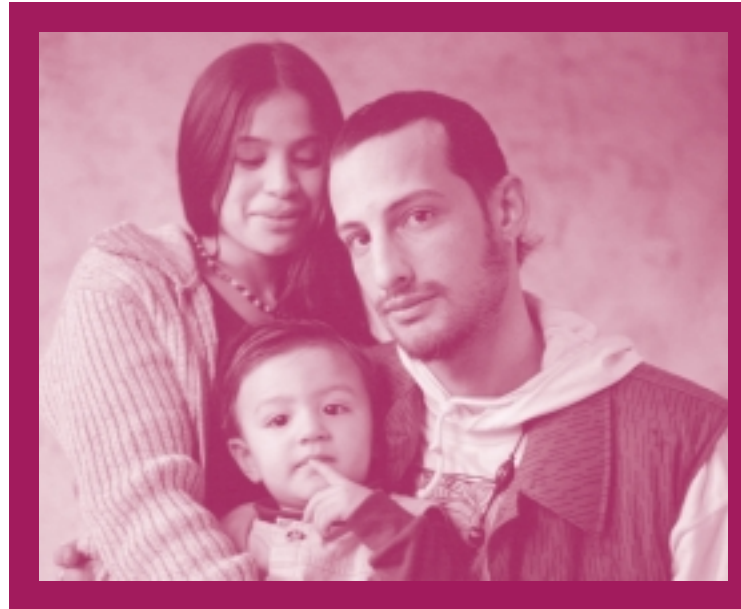
As discussed earlier, in order for partnerships to be successful, traditional volunteer organizations need to understand the differences in terminology and need to use language that resonates with residents of low-income communities. Failure to use the appropriate language can mask powerful community assets, inhibit the development of relationships, and create barriers to involvement.

Empower Communities to Help Themselves Another key lesson of this project is that in order to bring about meaningful change in a tough community, the residents themselves need to “own” both

the issue and the solution. People in those communities have often been the targets or objects of solutions imposed by external sources. Many residents are accustomed to external programs "parachuting" in a group of volunteers with quick-fix plans to solve a community problem, deemed relevant by persons living outside the community, such as one-day beautification projects. Often, these programs fail to address the deeper issues that persist in low-income communities, and they also breed resentment toward outside organizations and individuals.

For the results of community initiatives to be sustained over time and actually make an impact, residents must be empowered to identify their own problems and implement local solutions. They must plan, organize, and lead community projects that they believe are important and relevant to their lives. Where does this leave outside partners? First, outside partners must come to understand the root causes of poverty and racism that underlie most inequities in our society. Traditional volunteer organizations must shift their perception of themselves as providers of "charity to the poor" to providers of resources that will enable tough communities to become self-supportive. How these organizations and their volunteers describe their objectives as they enter a community and engage in the process of mobilizing residents to improve conditions can have a critical impact on their effectiveness.

Furthermore, outside partners such as traditional volunteer organizations can play an important role in helping empower community members. In a number of pilot sites, organizations used their expertise in volunteer management, program planning, and other leadership development skills to help residents take ownership of their communities' problems and find local solutions. Projects in Denver, Tampa Bay, and Providence included youth service initiatives that provided training, technical assistance, and financial support specifically to groups of young people who, in turn, identified their own community problems and implemented a range of creative solutions. One could argue that focusing efforts on empowering young people is an effective way to strengthen families and make a long-term impact on communities.



[Residents'] involvement needs to be applicable to their day-to-day life. If it is about their children, they will come. About community improvement, maybe. If the purpose is far-reaching, no.

“Volunteering is a wonderful way to help others while gaining valuable experience and skills and is a good way to find out if you like a particular type of work and to build a resume.”

Resident
Providence, Rhode Island

In Baltimore, the Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers and the Central Maryland Consortium on Volunteerism acknowledged the importance of empowerment by engaging residents of low-income communities in planning and implementing programs for a new Volunteer Center. The outcome of this resident involvement was to focus the Center's activities to respond to the needs identified by community residents—to expand after-school programs—and allow community residents to take part in, and directly benefit from, the Volunteer Center's programs.

Cultivate Community Members' Skills and Talents To ensure successful partnerships with low-income communities, it is critical that outside organizations acknowledge and build on existing community assets. The gifts and talents of community members are the most valuable assets for strengthening communities and building stronger families. However, members of low-income communities often experience low self-esteem and believe that they have no gifts, talents, or skills to contribute. Helping residents find ways to identify the personal assets that they can bring to community-building initiatives—such as leading programs, serving on boards, designing flyers, providing child care during meetings, or cooking food for volunteers—helps build community capacity while strengthening the individuals involved.

Pilot communities acknowledged the importance of identifying existing “human resources” that can be mobilized. Some, like Greensboro, went so far as to use a capacity inventory tool to map out the collective assets of the community and residents' specific talents that could be employed in their initiative. Others, such as Providence, Rhode Island, structured their programs around the strengths of residents by engaging them as volunteers to provide clerical support and child care assistance in the Public Housing Authority's youth program. This made the programs less expensive to run and developed leadership and job skills, as well as a sense of ownership, among Housing Authority parents.

Strengthen Existing Community Leadership Strong community leadership is required in order to mobilize a community for change. Community leaders help unify the neighborhood, engage residents in the initiative, and tap into residents' unique skills and talents. In order to work effectively in low-income communities, outside organizations must form partnerships with existing community leaders. Not only is this an effective vehicle for mobilizing communities, but it is also essential in order to build trust and learn to respect local perspectives and experiences. While working with grassroots leaders, traditional volunteer organizations can help them hone their leadership skills and cultivate a new generation of leaders.

Several pilot sites initiated leadership development activities. The Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, already managing a Small Grants Program for neighborhood associations, realized that additional funding would not fully benefit the communities without skilled leaders. Working with the Volunteer Center, the Foundation provided leaders from the grantee neighborhood associations with training in volunteer recruitment and program development. In Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Foundation and the Volunteer Center specifically identified leaders in communities of faith—in this city, a wealth of resources—to engage in a formal training program in volunteer management. Once the leaders complete the training program, the partners plan to institute a “Train the Trainer” component that will enable the leaders to go back to their communities and teach these skills to emerging leaders.

Acknowledge That Neighboring Is an Exchange A lack of financial resources is one of the most significant barriers to neighboring in communities, as is lack of time. For many, the need to work two jobs, lack of access to child care, or lack of transportation leave little or no time for community involvement activities. This is especially true for single parents. One of the most important themes we heard throughout this project is the need for volunteers to receive something in exchange for their time and efforts.

Research on volunteering and comments by participants in our dialogues and interviews clearly reveal that all volunteers derive benefits from volunteering, perhaps as much as the recipients of the service. Volunteers, regardless of socioeconomic status, acquire new skills, higher self-esteem, new contacts and networks, and sometimes even new jobs.

All volunteers, and particularly those in tough communities, need to be rewarded for their contributions in ways that make sense and have meaning for them. In low-income communities, where many residents struggle to meet basic needs, an appropriate exchange could be meals, services such as tutoring, child care subsidies, and employment or job training opportunities. Two pilot sites experimented with this concept. In Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Community Foundation helped to expand the innovative Community HeroCard to the Lakeside Corridor, a low-income community. The HeroCard is a system for turning volunteer hours into Community Service Dollars that can be redeemed for retail items sold by participating businesses. The program is a direct response to the notion that volunteers are more likely to participate if they receive something tangible in exchange.

As described earlier, the Providence Housing Authority experimented with a range of "rewards" in order to encourage parents to volunteer in youth programs. Adults can volunteer in exchange for credits that allow their children to attend the youth programs, or in exchange for welfare-to-work credits or job training classes. Because there are a range of volunteer tasks to choose from, parents in the program view the experience as an important way to develop job skills and build a resume.

Ensure Community Readiness A final factor that we identified as essential to the success of partnerships between traditional volunteer organizations and tough communities is the concept of community readiness. In order to be prepared to partner with outside organizations, low-income communities must cultivate the internal capacity to engage their residents in community activities. For joint community-building initiatives to be effective, neighborhoods need to be organized, issues

need to be prioritized, residents need to be united, and leaders need to be committed.

Furthermore, neighborhoods need time to develop trust in outside partners. For this to happen, external partners must show respect for local people and processes and have patience regarding the time it takes to gain buy-in from community members, develop a meaningful partnership, and start to produce results. In the experience of most of our pilot communities, one year was not enough time to build a partnership and implement a community initiative. The process of building the relationships, let alone implementing a project, can be extremely time consuming. Staff from pilot site organizations found this very challenging and learned that time lines would often need to be extended to allow for this readiness to develop.

Not only does it take time to get community buy-in, but often, unexpected events occur in the community that distract organizers from moving forward on a time line. This is true everywhere, but particularly true in low-income communities, where residents frequently struggle on various fronts, both individually and collectively. For instance, in Greensboro, residents involved in expanding the network of safe houses became sidetracked when the community received a Hope VI grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to rebuild a neighborhood housing development. Because of a debate surrounding the use of the funds and the concern for family displacement, community attention was diverted to this urgent issue while the safe houses were temporarily put on hold. The Community Foundation and the Volunteer Center, through their partnership with the community, realized that they had to respect residents' need to focus on the most imminent battles first.

"It takes a longer time than you expect and hope. You have to be flexible enough to adapt to the reality of what's going on in the neighborhood. That's part of developing trust."

Community Foundation Partner
Greensboro, North Carolina

...volunteering expands economic opportunities. For some, it is an important way to gain job skills; for others, it is a way to tap into the networks through which people hear about job opportunities and gain access to employers, a chronic challenge for people in marginalized neighborhoods.



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Benefits of Leveraging Resources for Partnerships

While projects funded through this initiative are still in the pilot stage, we are confident that the partnerships will continue to benefit all involved: community foundations and Volunteer Centers, low-income neighborhoods and families, and other nonprofits and businesses.

Benefits to Community Foundations and Volunteer Centers

For the community foundations and Volunteer Centers, as well as other formal nonprofit organizations involved in the collaborations, this project was an opportunity to gain awareness of issues associated with working in these communities. It helped expand their work to a new constituency, opening doors to neighborhoods with which they had desired to work, but did not really know how to enter. Furthermore, partners had the opportunity to relate to residents of low-income communities not as recipients of service, but as real partners, with access to resources, an understanding of local problems, a long-term commitment to community improvement, and remarkable resilience.

Working together on initiatives offered all partners a chance to decrease their stereotypes and prejudices, which contribute to the isolation and disconnection of low-income communities. As our population continues to diversify, it will be particularly important for traditional volunteer organizations, funders, and other nonprofit organizations to build partnerships across neighborhoods, cultures, and economic strata in order to engage all members of the "community" we claim to serve.

Benefits to Low-Income Neighborhoods and Families For the neighborhood groups in tough communities, this project was an opportunity to access partners with which they might not have had previous contact, as well as much-needed technical assistance and financial support for their initiatives. In addition to these tangible resources, it was also beneficial for communities to receive support for activities and ideas created by community members, rather than by outsiders, and to know that someone believed in them and was interested in promoting their efforts.

For families in tough communities, initiatives such as this will undoubtedly have a long-term impact. In sites such as Providence, Rhode Island, and Baltimore, Maryland, families are strengthened because the youth programs are designed to involve the whole family and help parents spend time with their children. In Tampa Bay, Florida, families will be strengthened via a focus on fathering. In other sites' initiatives, where the focus on family strengthening is less direct, the connection is clear. Families are strengthened—and children's lives are improved—through the existence of the following components:

- Supportive neighborhood institutions;
- Strong social networks; and
- Expanded economic opportunities.⁵

Volunteer mobilization, and partnerships with outside organizations to promote it, can play a vital role in creating all three components. First, volunteer engagement can be an effective way to reinvigorate neighborhood institutions; these efforts are often the target of community initiatives in low-income communities. In our experience, the Volunteer Centers themselves were strengthened as neighborhood institutions, and Centers were transformed to be more welcoming and responsive to residents in low-income communities.

Additionally, community initiatives build social networks. Community involvement increases personal ties to other community members and groups and increases the flow of communication through tough communities.

Finally, volunteering expands economic opportunities. For some, it is an important way to gain job skills; for others, it is a way to tap into the networks through which people hear about job opportunities and gain access to employers, a chronic challenge for people in tough neighborhoods.

"It is a cyclical effect. The program grew because of the community, and the community grew because of the program."

Staff Member
Volunteer Center of Rhode Island
Providence, Rhode Island

Benefits to Nonprofits and Businesses One particular constituency that played a role in this project, and has the potential to play an even greater role in communities across the country, is the business sector. Corporate involvement—through cash and in-kind donations, as well as employee volunteer programs—can be beneficial for the tough communities in which they do business while helping companies to improve community relations, build employee morale, and cultivate new markets. In 1990, Business for Social Responsibility stated, “America’s inner cities are being rediscovered by business. Areas once seen as risky and unrewarding places to do business are now being viewed as rich, untapped veins of customers, workers, facilities, and infrastructure.”

While corporate involvement was not required in our grant criteria, businesses did play a meaningful role in many of the collaborations. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, businesses promoted community involvement by accepting Community Service Dollars in exchange for retail items. In Greensboro, North Carolina, a national building supply company donated child safety equipment to outfit safe houses for residents escaping adverse situations in their homes. As volunteer initiatives evolve in communities, businesses and corporations are taking note and designing creative and meaningful ways to help low-income communities, exercising social responsibility and attaining the outcomes discussed above.

Examples of Corporate Initiatives in Low-Income Communities

- **United Airlines** Through its Believers Program, United Airlines provides scholarships, financial assistance, and mentoring and tutoring by employees to youth from low-income communities.
- **BankBoston** BankBoston started an urban investment bank that provides capital to businesses and nonprofits operating in low-income communities, leading to increased job opportunities and community capital.
- **Pitney Bowes** Through a range of initiatives, Pitney Bowes helps revitalize affordable housing, provides reduced-hour internships to college students with financial need, and provides funding for Head Start programs and companion programs for parents of Head Start children.

We are at a critical juncture: The gap between the increasingly affluent dominant society and communities still lacking in many essential resources will only widen unless deliberate steps are taken to build bridges.



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Guidelines for Community Empowerment

“I’ve found that Points of Light and other foundations view volunteering as outsiders coming in to help the community. Now they are seeing the value of residents doing the work and giving them resources to be effective.”

Nettie Coad
Greensboro, North Carolina

The seven critical success factors described in “Vital Success Factors” (page 22) were among the most important lessons learned from this initiative. As has been discussed, it is our hope that findings from this project will inspire and enable other foundations, Volunteer Centers, national nonprofit organizations, and businesses to pursue family-strengthening and neighborhood-based partnerships with low-income communities.

We are at a critical juncture: The gap between the increasingly affluent dominant society and communities still lacking in many essential resources will only widen unless deliberate steps are taken to build bridges. We believe that traditional volunteer organizations and their partners can play a major role by reaching out to develop relationships with people in tough communities, supporting their struggles, and leveraging resources to make a real difference.

As a complement to this monograph, worksheets are provided that help serve as a barometer for determining successful partnerships with low-income communities. To summarize this initiative, we close by sharing some additional “how-to” tips. Whether you represent a Volunteer Center, corporation, community foundation, nonprofit organization, community of faith, or other group, these guidelines are designed to help you thoughtfully approach and organize a successful partnership, thereby playing a key role in strengthening neighborhoods and families.

Build Trusting Relationships Learn about the neighborhoods in your community. What are the issues they face? Which neighborhoods have projects with resident involvement emerging or already underway? Who are the community's leaders? Are they interested in partnering with others?

Explore Your Organization's Motives for Partnering With Low-Income Communities What goals or anticipated outcomes are you pursuing through partnership? What do you hope to gain? Why is it important that you establish a partnership? What is your long-term commitment to low-income neighborhoods and to partnerships? What assets do you

offer? How can you add value to the community's work? Have you heard residents' voices?

Learn About How Members Come Together to Address Issues and Concerns Meet with key community leaders or invite community representatives to forums where they can participate and become informed about resources for the neighborhood. Develop connections with leaders and residents that foster sustainable activities to address the issues they want to work on in their community.

Identify Potential Partners What other organizations or individuals in the community should you involve in the partnership? Which partners are essential to the success of the project? Is the local Volunteer Center involved? Which businesses in the community have an interest in this neighborhood? Is the community foundation involved? Are other organizations already working with the community? If so, which ones?

Establish a Partnership Plan With a Realistic Timetable and Realistic Expectations Develop a shared understanding of the partnership and what you hope to achieve together. How will each partner contribute to the overall action plan and, ultimately, to its success? What is required to build a trusting relationship with the community and its leaders, and how will this impact your timetable?

Expect and Plan for Setbacks Identify the likely challenges and barriers that may influence the partnership's success. How will you deal with changes in key project personnel or community leaders? What financial and other resources must be raised?

Learn From the Experience, Pause to Reflect, Evaluate, and Celebrate Your Shared Accomplishments What will a successful partnership project look like? What will be accomplished? How will the community change? How do you plan to measure your success?

The Points of Light Foundation, after an inspiring three-year journey with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, believes that community involvement is an essential element for building self-sufficient communities and strengthening the families they comprise. The experiences and lessons of the community foundations, Volunteer Centers, community-based organizations, and grassroots leaders with whom we worked have created an important road map for potential partners to engage with low-income communities. We look forward to continuing to explore and share important strategies for solving tough problems in neighborhoods across the country.

Endnotes

- 1 The woman described in this story asked that we not use her real name.
- 2 United Auto Workers, 1999, *Washington Report*, Vol. 31, No. 1, January 15.
- 3 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, grant notice.
- 4 The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development presentation.
- 5 Sommerfield, Meg, 1999, "Casey Goes to Bat for Families," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, June 17.



I've found that Points of light and other foundations view volunteering as outsiders coming in to help the community. Now they are seeing the value of residents doing the work and giving them resources to be effective.

Permission to copy, disseminate,
or otherwise use the worksheets from
*A Matter of Survival: Volunteering By,
In, and With Low-Income Communities*
is granted as long as appropriate
acknowledgment is given.

Implementation and Evaluation

Relationship building is critical for entering and working with low-income communities. It is the foundation for mobilizing and engaging leaders and residents. Successful partnerships with low-income communities require engaging leaders and residents in the planning process, allowing residents to ensure that their needs and desires are heard, and ensuring that residents play an important role in the partnership. During the partnership development phase, organizations will often encounter some challenges and obstacles, but with effective strategies, there are ways to successfully overcome them. Ultimately, the success of your partnership will be determined by how well you engage the community and how well you sustain the relationship.

As a complement to this monograph, enclosed are worksheets that serve as a barometer for creating successful partnerships with low-income communities. The worksheets are designed to assist you in building partnerships that are beneficial for both the organization and the community. Each worksheet is accompanied by a list of guidelines that offer ideas and suggestions for mobilizing and engaging neighborhood residents. Use the worksheets as a guide to create a successful community partnership; to document the goals and objectives of the partnership and each members' contribution; to document the challenges and barriers; to create volunteer opportunities for residents; and to build a vocabulary of commonly used terms for identifying resident volunteers in the community. Also included is a list of ideas to help you demonstrate appreciation of residents' involvement and help residents realize the benefits of their participation.

Please be encouraged to duplicate the guidelines and worksheets as often as necessary. Each worksheet is user friendly and offers a step-by-step process for building, measuring, and evaluating your partnership.

Implementation and Evaluation

A Matter of Survival: Volunteering

Volunteering By, In, and With Low-Income Communities

explores the role volunteering plays in building the social capital necessary to transform neighborhoods into family-strengthening communities; as well as offers Volunteer Centers, community foundations, nonprofits, businesses, and others suggestions on the most effective ways to partner with residents and leaders in low-income neighborhoods. There is a rich tradition of civic engagement in many of America's "tough" communities that often goes overlooked. Here is a first step of sharing and acknowledging the efforts of people who drive reform in their communities.



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